

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
On Senate Passage of the
Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program Reauthorization Act of 2015
May 6, 2015**

Today, the Senate is finally coming together to pass the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program Reauthorization Act of 2015. I have fought for this lifesaving grant program for more than 17 years, since Republican Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and I first worked to create the program. This partnership now has provided more than 13,000 state and local law enforcement agencies with nearly 1.2 million bulletproof vests for their officers. Today's action by the Senate will move us one step closer to ensuring that, for the next five years, thousands of agencies can purchase vests for officers serving in their communities.

These are not just empty words. And this is not an empty gesture. This is perhaps the most tangible support that Congress can provide to law enforcement officers. Passing this bill will help to put vests on the backs of more than 200,000 police officers. Passing this bill will save lives.

Just ask the Chief of the Woodway, Texas, Police Department, Yost Zakhary. Chief Zakhary testified at a Senate Judiciary hearing last year. He brought this vest with him to the hearing. The officer wearing it was shot during a roadside stop. The officer lost a lot of blood, but he did not lose his life. And that is because this vest – purchased through this partnership grant program – caught the bullet destined for his heart.

Or ask Officer Ann Carrizales of the Stafford, Texas, Police Department. She also testified at the hearing last year. She will tell you that her vest, uniquely fitted for her body, saved her life when she was shot twice during a routine traffic stop. Her testimony was some of the most moving testimony that I have ever heard in my 40 years in the Senate. She brought with her nearly 200 letters from her daughter's elementary school, all calling on the Senate to act.

This bill is important. It is important to law enforcement around the nation – and it most certainly is important for Vermont. I am proud to say that Vermont law enforcement agencies have already received nearly 4,400 protective vests through this program. Recent recipients include agencies in Addison County, Barre City, Barre Town, Bennington County, Berlin, Brattleboro, Burlington, Caledonia County, Chester, Dover, Essex County, Essex Junction, Franklin County, Grand Isle County, Hardwick, Hartford, Ludlow, Middlebury, Milton, Montpelier, Morristown, Newport, Northfield, Norwich, Orange County, Orleans County, Richmond, Rutland, Shelburne, South Burlington, Springfield, St. Albans, St. Johnsbury, Stowe, Waterbury Village, Weathersfield, Williston, Windsor County, Windsor, and Winooski. Because of this program, law enforcement officers throughout Vermont are better protected and better able to do their jobs.

The Bulletproof Vest Partnership has helped to make protective vests standard equipment for law enforcement agencies across the country. Yet for far too many jurisdictions – especially rural and smaller agencies like those in Vermont – vests still cost too much and wear out too

soon. We know that bulletproof vests will not save every officer, but they already have saved the lives of more than 3,000 law enforcement officers since 1987. I have met with police officers who are alive today because of vests purchased through this program, and they will attest to the fact that this program saves lives. These vests also are a comfort for families, to know that their loved ones have them.

This bill also contains a number of improvements to the grant program. I want to thank Senator Feinstein for helping to improve the bill so that it provides incentives for agencies to provide uniquely fitted vests for female officers. The bill also ensures that agencies have mandatory-wear policies to ensure that the vests are used regularly.

Saving lives should not be a partisan issue, and I am especially grateful to Senator Graham for being the lead cosponsor and for his efforts to help pass this important legislation. I am also thankful to the law enforcement community, which has long spoken with a single voice on this issue and has strongly supported this effort. As the bill now moves to the House of Representatives, I urge Speaker Boehner to quickly take up this bill and so it can be sent to the President's desk for his signature next week.

As we approach National Police Week, it is time that we truly honor the brave men and women of law enforcement who have lost their lives serving their communities. It is time we put real meaning behind our words of tribute. It is time we pass this bill.

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